

**Welcome to participants of the Roundtable on
*Building Citizenship Governance and Service Provision in Canada***

by

Maureen O'Neil

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10 a.m.

I want to take a few moments to welcome you to IDRC, to thank you for demonstrating your interest in the topic of the Roundtable to take time out to spend the better part of a day with us. I want particularly to thank those of you who have travelled to Ottawa, with very special thanks to Dr. Sulley Gariba of Ghana and Dr. John Kiyaga-Nsubuga of Uganda who have travelled far to join us today.

I also want to take a few moments to provide a bit of background to this event. I anticipate the question: Why is IDRC funding an event that focusses on Canadian Citizenship issues? Welcome to a special initiative—that is to say, an initiative that is somewhat off IDRC's program track. But only somewhat—there **IS** method in our madness.

Just over a year ago, IDRC convened a meeting in this room to seek advice on a tentative proposal for a research program to support empirical, policy relevant research addressing some key governance and development issues in Sub Saharan Africa. Health was identified as the issue around which governance and equity issues would be researched. The consultation indicated three possible entry points for the Centre: 1) decentralization and service delivery; 2) public service provision; and 3) citizenship. With advice from that meeting, the Centre is taking further steps to explore the merits of supporting research under a **Governance, Equity and Health** rubric. Dr. Mousa Samb, who is with us today, recently joined the Centre to work on this new program area.

It was when thinking through the implications of the 'citizenship entry point' and especially thinking about the many forces that determine how the citizen defines, consciously and unconsciously, himself/herself—ethnicity, language, tribal ties, religion, political affiliation, etc.—that is, the complex mix of multiple identities and loyalties subsumed under the concept of citizenship, that I was struck by the fact that we in Canada have a history of working with this complexity—that we are, as I discovered from some of CPRN's work, actively engaged in thinking through this complexity and what it means for the Canadian policy.

My first thought was: What could Canada's historical and current experience of citizenship and related issues bring to the conceptual framework that IDRC will need as a reference point for its work under the Governance, Equity and Health Initiative? What definitions, theories and concepts contend to provide a better understanding of the 'citizenship entry point' we have identified for IDRC-supported research? I am struck by the fact that, for Canadians, national

identity and citizenship are not underpinned by a pantheon of iconic figures nor a liturgy of patriotic struggle. I would suggest that, for Canadians, an important part of their national identity is found in the collective demand and support for the set of public goods that have linked the Federation (the railway, CBC), that have levelled the economic playing field (regulatory bodies such as the CRTC and the Marketing Boards) and shared risk (socialized health care).

A key question then is: To what extent does the Canadian experience—past and present—have anything to say about options for Africans? I hope we shall explore this question during today's discussion and am especially keen to hear what Dr. Gariba and Dr. Kiyaga-Nsubuga have to say.

But my second thought was—whether or not the Canadian experience can offer a resource for Africa—was to avoid the hubris of the Northern donor suggesting quick fixes to Africa. I think we can do this by reminding ourselves that a globalizing world is also challenging Canada to make critical social and economic choices, straining the shared values that we like to think underpin our citizenship and national well being. A keen awareness of these domestic, national stresses is a precursor to IDRC staff nurturing research and knowledge collaborations with African researchers and practitioners.

The papers prepared for this roundtable and our discussion today will provide a reference point for both Canadian and African researchers highlighting the virtues of what CPRN has called a 'common citizenship' and reminding us of what a tough option this can be.

Again, thank you for helping IDRC with this special initiative.